

"We want this community center to be run the right way, and the way that it's set up under the terms of the current agreement it doesn't provide for so much of what the community expected."

The community center at 200 North End Avenue, built and furnished by the Battery Park City Authority, was originally slated to open last November. But an ongoing contract dispute between the Authority and the community center's chosen operator, Asphalt Green, continues to delay its opening, the Authority acknowledged last month.

"We have encountered difficulties in preparing to implement our contract with Asphalt Green, primarily because of the differing requirements for transparency and community participation BPCA must comply with in spending public money, as compared to a private organization," recently appointed BPCA chairman Dennis Mehiel said in a statement. "We are actively pursuing a solution that will allow the Center to open under terms and conditions that protect the assets we are charged with administering."

As of Oct. 3, the center has been cleared by the Department of Buildings to open, but the day when residents will be able to use the basketball courts, gym, swimming pools and other facilities remains uncertain. Since Mehiel's statement on Sept. 12, neither the Battery Park City Authority nor Asphalt Green will publicly comment on the contract under dispute.

Asphalt Green supporters say, unequivocally, that they want the organization to run the center and without more delay. Those like Coleman, boosters of the local youth leagues and the Manhattan Youth-run Downtown Community Center, want guarantees that people of all means can use its facilities and that programs run by Asphalt Green will not take away field time from the leagues, or the summer camp run by Manhattan Youth.

"We want to make sure these details that we care about don't get lost," said BPC parent Stacia Harris, one of the rally's organizers. "We are not against it opening. We want it open soon, we just want to make sure it is done right."

Organizers of the rally on Thursday said they want to see a "complete revision" of the contract with Asphalt Green to reflect a 2010 memorandum of understanding crafted by Community Board 1.

The memorandum, which was never signed by the Battery Park City Authority, creates a committee of local officials, community board members and stakeholders to oversee decisions regarding use of the ballfields. The committee would also have a say in whether Asphalt Green could run any programs that would compete with those by Manhattan Youth or local youth leagues.

"We don't know that we are losing anything yet," said Downtown Soccer League president Bill Bialosky, who was originally told that Asphalt Green had no interest in the ball fields. So far, Bialosky said, Asphalt Green has only asked for ball field time during the summer, when it would cut into time set aside for Manhattan Youth's campers, but not any of the sports leagues.

"We just want to see a community charter established that really forms this roadmap [for the ball fields] and doesn't leave it up to the discretion of someone," Bialosky said.

The memorandum would also ban the Authority from subsidizing programs at the community center that compete with the Downtown Community Center without also offering funding to the Downtown Community Center.

Those who want Asphalt Green to open right away say there's plenty of demand for youth programs offered by both the Downtown Community Center and Asphalt Green.

"There are enough kids down here to support all the programs," said Chris Nelson. "It would be nice to have some choices ... I think it would be better for the community to have a little variety."



Top: A rally in support of renegotiating the Authority's contract with Asphalt Green on Thursday. Above: Liz McCabe addresses residents on Sunday about organizing in support of Asphalt Green.

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Under the current contract, Asphalt Green supporters argue, there is no evidence that the ball fields are in jeopardy. They say they are frustrated by efforts to renegotiate a contract that has already been signed.

“They went through a bidding process. They’ve been approved,” said Erika Teresko, a Battery Park City parent who has been active in the movement to open the center. “I want to trust the original process.”

Teresko and fellow event organizer Liz McCabe have collected more than 350 signatures so far in an online petition calling for Asphalt Green to open.

Representatives from both groups are expected to speak to Community Board 1 at its monthly meeting Tuesday, 6 p.m. at the South Street Seaport Museum.

In the meantime, Teresko, who paid for memberships to Asphalt Green months ago, anxiously awaits a resolution.

“I think it’s sad that we are not able to see this resource to fruition,” she said.

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